

keep traveling the country reminding people of the obligation that we have in Washington, DC, to bring folks together and to fix this problem, so that people will say, when it's all said and done, "They came, they went, and they did their job."

Listen, I want to thank you all for coming. I hope you found this conversation interesting, informative. It is—I believe it's necessary. And I want to thank our panelists who did a fantastic job of sharing with us what's on your mind. There's a lot of people like you out there that are asking the question, "What are you going to do about it?" And I'm ready to lead on the issue.

May God bless you all. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:22 p.m. at Montgomery County Community College. In his remarks, he referred to James R. Mathews, chairman, Board of Commissioners, Montgomery County, PA; President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; President Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine; and Janet Norwood, mother of Sgt. Byron Norwood, USMC, who was killed in Iraq on November 13, 2004, and Iraqi citizen and political activist Safia Taleb al-Suhail, both of whom were guests of the First Lady at the President's State of the Union Address on February 2.

### **Statement on Senate Action on Class-Action Lawsuit Reform Legislation**

*February 10, 2005*

Our country depends on a fair legal system that protects people who have been harmed without encouraging junk lawsuits that undermine confidence in our courts while hurting our economy, costing jobs, and threatening small businesses. The class-action bill is a strong step forward in our efforts to reform the litigation system and keep America the best place in the world to do business. I applaud the strong bipartisan majority in the Senate for passing this bill, and I call on the House to act promptly so that I can sign it into law.

### **Memorandum on Waiving Prohibition on Use of Fiscal Year 2005 Economic Support Funds With Respect to Jordan**

*February 10, 2005*

Presidential Determination No. 2005–20

*Memorandum for the Secretary of State*

*Subject:* Waiving Prohibition on Use of Fiscal Year 2005 Economic Support Funds with Respect to Jordan

Consistent with the authority vested in me by section 574 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2005 (the "Act"), Division D of Public Law 108–447, I hereby:

- Determine that it is important to the national security interests of the United States to waive, for a period of 6 months from the date of this determination, the prohibition of section 574(a) of the Act with respect to Jordan; and
- Waive the prohibition with respect to this country for that period.

You are authorized and directed to report this determination to the Congress, and to arrange for its publication in the *Federal Register*.

**George W. Bush**

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 11.

### **Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Michael O. Leavitt as Secretary of Health and Human Services**

*February 11, 2005*

**The President.** Good morning. I'm proud to visit this fine Department and to congratulate my friend Michael Leavitt on becoming America's 20th Secretary of Health and Human Services. Congratulations.

**Secretary Leavitt.** Thank you, Mr. President.

**The President.** I know this is a particularly special day for Mike—after all, it's his 54th birthday. [Laughter] And it's always a

special day for him when his family members are here. He loves his family. He's got a great wife named Jackie; Westin is here representing his brothers and sisters; his dad's first name is Dixie—kind of sounds like he should be from Texas. *[Laughter]* Appreciate the other members of the Leavitt family who are here.

I want to thank Senator Bob Bennett from the great State of Utah for joining us, and Congressman Ralph Regula for being here. I appreciate you both coming. I want to thank other members of my Cabinet and administration who have joined us. I particularly want to thank the men and women of Health and Human Services for your hard work and remind you that you're serving during a critical time for America's health and well-being.

Thanks to Secretary Tommy Thompson's superb leadership, HHS has helped our medical community prepare for a new era in public health. You've made groundbreaking progress toward new cures for disability and disease. You've led a bold initiative to win the global fight against HIV/AIDS. The good work of this Department is making America healthier and more hopeful, and I thank each of you for your commitment and your compassion.

As Secretary Leavitt begins his service, HHS is embarking on a set of new challenges and historic opportunities. One of your most important responsibilities will be implementing the Medicare Modernization Act, which I signed some 14 months ago. This law is a landmark achievement in American health care, and millions of older Americans are already benefiting from its reforms.

Because we acted, Medicare now covers preventive medicine, including screenings for heart disease and diabetes, and a "Welcome to Medicare" physical. Instead of waiting to get sick or facing costly treatments, seniors can now identify problems early and manage them before they grow worse. By reducing major surgeries and longtime hospital stays, preventive medicine will save money, and more importantly, it will extend the lives of our seniors.

Because we acted, Medicare will also cover prescription drugs. Under the old system, Medicare would pay \$28,000 for ulcer sur-

gery but not the \$500 a year for the prescription drugs that eliminated the cause of most ulcers. That system didn't make any sense. It made no sense for our seniors. It made no sense for American taxpayers.

Because prescription drugs are expensive, many seniors face the terrible choice between buying groceries and buying medicine. We left those days behind with the Medicare Modernization Act. Low-income seniors can get up to \$600 to buy medicine this year. Next January, every senior in Medicare will have the option of a prescription drug benefit. And so that all seniors can get the care they need, low-income seniors will get extra assistance and will pay a reduced premium or no premiums at all on prescription drugs.

Because we acted, seniors in Medicare will have more control over their health care. Seniors will be able to choose a health plan that meets their needs, and health plans will compete for their business, which will lower costs throughout the program. The system probably sounds familiar to some here—*[laughter]*—after all, it's what we offer Federal employees. If choosing your health plan is good enough for the Federal employees, it's good enough for America's seniors as well.

Putting these reforms into action will be challenging. But with the leadership of Secretary Leavitt and Administrator McClellan, I know you're up to the task. We all know the alternative to reform, a Medicare system that offers outdated benefits and imposes needless costs. For decades, we promised America's seniors that we can do better, and we finally did. Now we must keep our word. I signed Medicare reform proudly, and any attempt to limit the choices of our seniors and to take away their prescription drug coverage under Medicare will meet my veto.

Secretary Leavitt will also lead important reforms in the Medicaid program. He will work closely with the Governors to make Medicaid more fair and more flexible. And together, we will take new steps to ensure that Medicaid fully serves our most vulnerable citizens, especially our children. Both Medicare and the State Children's Health Insurance Program—it's what's called SCHIP—offer preventive care to low-income families at little or no cost. Yet, millions

of eligible American children are not signed up. So I proposed a billion dollar effort called "Cover the Kids" to help States and community groups and faith-based charities enroll more children in Medicaid and SCHIP. We must not allow a lack of attention or a lack of information to stand between these children and the health care they need.

To reinforce America's health safety net, we are also increasing support for community health centers. These compassionate facilities meet a critical need by providing primary care to the poor and the uninsured. They also take the pressure off of our emergency rooms and our hospitals. When I took office, I pledged to open or expand 1,200 community health centers by 2006. Thanks to the hard work of this Department, we've opened or expanded 619 centers so far, and we're on track to meet our objective by the end of next year. Now Secretary Leavitt and I are working toward a new goal: We will ensure that every poor county in America has a community health center.

As we deliver quality health care to those in need, we must also help more adults find private health insurance at their jobs. More than half of all the uninsured Americans are small-business employees and their families. To help these people get good coverage, I have asked Congress to allow small businesses to pool together to buy insurance at the same discounts that big companies get. I've proposed tax credits for small businesses and low-income workers that would allow more people to open tax-free health savings accounts. To reduce health care costs and prevent medical errors, we're working to expand the use of information technology in health care. And to make health care more affordable for every doctor, patient, and entrepreneur, Congress needs to pass medical liability reform this year.

At HHS you bring the hope of better health to millions of your fellow citizens, and you do much more. HHS promotes adoption and abstinence and preschool education and leads our efforts to stop drug abuse and domestic violence. Secretary Thompson has called this "America's Department of Com-

passion," and I know Secretary Leavitt sees it the same way.

Many of your greatest allies in the armies of compassion are found in faith-based and community groups. With Secretary Leavitt's leadership, we'll continue to support the hopeful works of these caring citizens. We'll also work with Congress to reauthorize welfare reforms that require work and strengthen marriage and promote responsible fatherhood. We'll continue the lifesaving work of combating HIV/AIDS at home and abroad.

As you fulfill all these duties, HHS is also meeting the needs of a nation at war. Researchers at NIH and the Centers for Disease Control are on the frontlines of defending America against the threat of bioterror. FDA inspectors are expanding efforts to secure the food supply and ensure the safety of medicine. We've completed the doubling of funding for medical research at NIH. Yet spending is not our only measure of success. When we commit taxpayer dollars, we will insist on results in return. And in every scientific pursuit, we will uphold the values of freedom, equality, and human dignity. We must never sanction the creation of life only to destroy it.

With this new responsibility, HHS Secretary Leavitt continues a distinguished career of public service. I've known him as a Governor. We're members of the ex-Governor's club. [*Laughter*] I've known him as the Administrator of the EPA. I've witnessed his integrity and creativity and compassion. He has a proven ability to move beyond the partisan debate, to work with leaders at all levels of government, and to improve the lives of the people he serves. That is what I've asked Mike to do as America's Secretary of Health and Human Services. With your help, I know he will succeed.

Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Great Hall at the Department of Health and Human Services. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Leavitt.

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### **Digest of Other White House Announcements**

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The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

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#### **February 5**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

#### **February 7**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

Also in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft to congratulate the team on their February 6 Super Bowl victory.

In the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President met with 2004 Nextel Cup NASCAR champion driver Kurt Busch. Later, also in the Oval Office, he met with Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez and his wife, Edilia.

#### **February 8**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Detroit, MI, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Jim Comer.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC. Later, in the Cabinet Room, he met with Republican Members of the House of Representatives to discuss Social Security.

The White House announced that the President will host President Traian Basescu of Romania at the White House on March 9.

The President announced his intention to nominate Jeffrey Clay Sell to be Deputy Secretary of Energy.

The President announced his intention to nominate Patricia Lynn Scarlett to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior.

The President announced that he has named Karl Rove as Assistant to the President, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Senior Adviser.

The President announced that he has named Michael J. Gerson as Assistant to the President for Policy and Strategic Planning.

#### **February 9**

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand to congratulate him on his party's February 6 parliamentary election victory and to discuss relief efforts following the December 26, 2004, earthquake and tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. He then had an intelligence briefing.

Also in the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark to congratulate him on his February 8 election victory and to discuss the elections in Iraq, the situation in the Middle East, and the President's upcoming visit to Europe.

In the afternoon, in the Residence, the President had lunch with President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland.

Later in the afternoon, in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building, the President made remarks at a business roundtable.

The President announced that he has named John E. Straub as Special Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Administration.

The President announced that he has named William McGurn as Assistant to the President for Speechwriting.

The President declared a major disaster in Kentucky and ordered Federal aid to supplement Commonwealth and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm and record snow on December 21–23, 2004.

The President declared a major disaster in Kansas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms, heavy rains, and flooding on January 4–6.

#### **February 10**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Raleigh, NC, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Jim Van Strien.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Blue Bell, PA, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer David Bulkley.